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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the future impacts on the the postsecondary educational delivery system triggered by projected changes in demographics, technology, the economy, and lifestyles. To help institutions prepare for and adapt to future changes, the paper presents the following projections: (1) postsecondary education will be evaluated more frequently in terms of its ability to provide marketable skills; (2) the demand for nontraditional learning will increase; (3) more courses will have to be offered at the times and locations preferred by students; (4) the average age of the postsecondary learner will increase, reducing student mobility; (5) new "education return" programs will be designed as fewer associate and bachelor degree programs will provide lifelong employment guarantees; (6) the value of liberal arts courses for workforce retention and advancement will be recognized; (7) students will seek course offerings based on institutional access and convenience, requiring a reduction in transfer barriers; (8) institutional costs will force colleges to narrow their focus and build new programs cooperatively; (9) diminishing student pools will lead to new courses to meet the short-term needs of the nontraditional college student; (10) institutions will emphasize image enhancement in order to increase the competitive opportunities of their graduates and secure greater public support; (11) employers will encourage more employees to undertake college-level work through tuition payment plans; (12) public pressure will force institutions to demonstrate program quality and relevance; (13) curriculum development and instructional delivery will require separate specializations; and (14) educational leadership systems will have to respond to organizational changes. (PAA)

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INFLUENCES ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE KNOWABLE FUTURE

A Concept Paper by
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Americans have developed a real fascination for the future. Speculations which used to be limited to gatherings of science fiction buffs are now becoming commonplace in board rooms and classrooms alike. Memberships in futuring organizations are growing at unprecedented rates, and practicing futurists are in high demand as speakers and lecturers in both industrial and educational settings.

Skeptics of this growing trend believe that such study is all a waste of time since no one is able to accurately predict the future. While that may be true for specific events or outcomes, many elements of the future can be projected with surprising accuracy. Demographic forecasts may be the best example of the predictable future. Obviously, all of the people living in the United States who will be eighteen years of age in the year 1990 are alive today. Likewise, all of the students who will graduate from high school in the year 1990 are attending classes today. Barring any catastrophy, fairly predictable patterns of migration and attrition will continue, resulting in reasonably accurate projections of the pool of high school graduates which can be expected in various states and regions of the country in the year 1990.

Fortunately, college and university leaders are not taking a back seat to their private sector counterparts in the area of competent futuring. The literature is beginning to reflect an abundance of clear thinking on the future and its likely impact on higher education. This article is intended to contribute to that knowledge base by describing some highly probable future impacts on the postsecondary educational delivery system being triggered by projected changes in America's demographic, technological, economic and life style patterns.

Externally-Mandated Change

Learning to assess probable future conditions before they occur is becoming as meaningful for educational leaders as it is for their corporate counterparts. Private sector leaders historically have been heavily impacted by external conditions and have focused attention in that direction for decades. But until the 1960's, most fundamental change which occurred at institutions of higher education sprang from internally generated proposals. The sixties, however, produced an era of social change which resulted in a "rights" orientation among many groups. College students were no exception. Although their petitions were initially regarded as frivolous intrusions on academic governance, over time, students' rights, and later consumers' rights, did bring about change in institutional policies.

The sixties also brought the beginning of the trend toward increased regulation of operating practices. Whether advocated for purposes such as clean air, energy conservation, equal employment, employee safety, or the public's right to know, each new series of legislated rules and court decisions required an organizational response. As a result, American colleges and universities frequently found themselves responding to external demands for change rather than the more traditional internal reasons. Institutions changed not because they wanted to, but because they had to.

The social and regulatory influences of the sixties were supplemented by equally strong demographic, technological and economic forces in the seventies. That decade saw the end of the baby-boomers' impact on K-12 enrollments and the simultaneous emergence of senior citizens as a major influence in shaping public policy. It also produced exponential growth in the introduction and use of computers in the workplace and at home. And maybe most

importantly, the seventies brought the beginning of a decline in employment in the manufacturing sector, one of the few areas where there was little correlation between advanced education and the ability to earn above-average wages as a production worker. These and other external factors, often generalized as environmental influences have been so profound that many academic leaders now concede that most recent fundamental changes occurring within their institutions are being motivated principally by external forces.

But what about tomorrow and the rest of this century? Will control of change in academic institutions be returned to the province of internal influences or will external factors continue to dominate? Certainly each component will have an impact, but trend lines suggest that external influences will likely outweigh internal factors. As a result, college and university decision-makers will need to spend a considerable amount of time and effort in predicting the future with as much accuracy as possible.

The Knowable Future

Noted futurist David Snyder is quite assertive about the predictability of the future. Recounting research conducted during the last decade under sponsorship of the National Science Foundation and the National Academy of Science, Snyder cites the relative reliability of various forecasts. In his paper "The Strategic Context of Education in America 1985 to 1995" (Bethesda, MD, 1985), Snyder affirms that demographic information provides the longest range accuracy in forecasting. In fact, demographic projections may be regarded as statistically reliable up to 15 years into the future.

Snyder goes on to state that technological forecasts -- that is, the projections of the types of technology which will be in common usage -- are usefully accurate from seven to ten years into the future. Knowing this

allows for conclusions to be drawn as to the technological environment which will likely exist in both the workplace and the home over the next few years. It also provides insight into the timing of technological change.

Unfortunately, forecasts of economic performance are seldom accurate for more than 90 days into the future. But, as Snyder notes, forecasts of large systems, such as a national economy, are enormously stable and do not change their composition or direction radically over short periods of time. As a result, by using historical trends, it is possible to draw relatively reliable conclusions of the basic nature of U.S. economic activity for as long as five to ten years into the future.

Merging together all of the demographic, technological and economic data that can be projected with a high degree of accuracy within a framework of anticipated lifestyle and regulatory conditions provides a rather clear picture of the "knowable future." Having access to such knowledge will provide a definite advantage to policy and decision-makers who have the responsibility for shaping the future of their organizations. Acting on fairly reliable forecasts of future conditions will permit a more proactive management style, whereas waiting for events to actually occur before initiating change will not only retard organizational progress, but will lock in a reactive institutional characteristic.

Implications for Higher Education

Following are sixteen conclusions which have been drawn from a consideration of predictions and forecasts within the context of the knowable future for higher education. The purpose here is not to recount the abundance of literature which provides a basis for these projections. Rather, the conjectures have been set aside from supporting documentation to focus attention squarely upon the issues facing academic leaders as they mobilize their respective institutions for change.

Although each of the conclusions cited can be viewed and evaluated on its own, there is also an interrelationship which exists among all 16 statements. Therefore, each conjecture may be regarded either as a foundation for, or an enhancement of, other statements.

1. The proportion of the adult population either choosing or needing to work will continue to increase throughout the balance of this century. As a result, education at all levels, and particularly at the postsecondary level, will more frequently be evaluated by both the consumer and the general public in terms of its relevance to the world of work.
2. There will be an explosion in the demand for legitimate, organized learning experiences by the post-high school age group. Those experiences, however, will not necessarily be taken for credit, and may not even be taken at traditional educational institutions. In addition, the learning requirements imposed by employers or self-selected by lifestyle decisions will diminish the time and money available for more traditional educational pursuits.
3. Educational experiences for adults will have to mesh with other equally important personal priorities such as work, family, recreation, and social responsibilities. Hence, educational institutions will have to develop "consumer-driven schedules" which will conform more closely to the times and locations preferred by the enrollees, and less to the personal convenience of staff and the historical practices of the institution.
4. State systems of higher education have generally been designed and built around the concept of a highly mobile, highly available class of young adults able to travel to "centers of excellence" for residential study. As the average age of the postsecondary learner increases, mobility will

lessen, and that philosophy will need to be reexamined for appropriateness. Opportunities for educational excellence will have to be made conveniently accessible to the students in recognition of their lessened mobility.

5. Few sets of educational experiences, including associate and bachelor degree programs, will provide a lifelong guarantee of employment. Colleges concerned for the long-term well-being of their graduates will need to design "educational return" programs, and to assist their alumni in knowing when to re-enter the system.
6. An alternative to current completion patterns for degree programs will need to be created which will permit students to complete their ultimate goal in logical segments. A student with a specific career goal may need to take three distinct sets of courses: those permitting entry into the work force, those guaranteeing retention in the work force, and those enabling advancement in the work force. The value of liberal arts courses will become increasingly more evident in the latter two segments.
7. Students in higher education will come to view themselves more frequently as "consumers of the whole." Although the institution will continue to strive for uniqueness, the student will review and select the best combination of offerings from all providers conveniently accessible. Cooperating institutions will come to enjoy a larger market share by reducing barriers to transfer.
8. The extreme cost of maintaining fully comprehensive postsecondary institutions will force many colleges to narrow their focus. Simultaneously, "specialty schools" will emerge. These new competitors will concentrate on a limited number of study fields, and will build a reputation for quality, utility, and cost-effectiveness in the disciplines they select.

9. Colleges being required to do more with less will band together in voluntary consortia to pursue new programs. Historical issues of turf and distrust will give way to the name of "lead institutions" for new endeavors. The efforts of lead institutions will accrue to the benefit of other colleges as well, but, over time, effort and benefit will balance out among the cooperating entities and will place that entire group ahead of non-participating colleges.

10. In addition to competing for new students from the diminishing pool of college-bound high school graduates, progressive institutions will develop educational offerings of value to the traditionally noncollege-bound graduates. Those offerings will appeal to their short-term needs, and will provide the basis for entry into traditional coursework at a later date.

11. To increase the competitive opportunities for their graduates, community colleges will devote greater energy and resources to enhancing their image and broadening their reputation. Regionally or nationally known community colleges will thereby provide greater geographic potential for their alumni, just as world class universities already provide worldwide mobility for theirs.

12. Increased financial support from public sources will be more easily gained for educational institutions that are viewed as advancing the public's agenda rather than their own. Gaining that perspective will not so much involve a change in offerings, but rather a change in the way existing offerings are interpreted to the public.

13. Adults who would not have been considered as typical "college material" when in high school will be encouraged, and in some cases required, to

undertake college-level coursework. Employer incentive and tuition payment plans will play a significant role in bringing these individuals into traditional collegiate classrooms.

14. Educational institutions will be called upon to demonstrate and document in understandable terms the quality and relevancy of their courses and programs. These demands will emanate from students and the general public in equal measure.

15. Development of curriculum content will come to be viewed as separate from delivery of instruction, giving rise to specialization in each. Institutions and individuals will develop reputations for excellence in one field, and entrust the complementary activity to others.

16. Educational leadership and governance systems will have to change in response to the changes in their own organizations. Institutions that have spent centuries studying everything else will now have to study themselves. Outside assistance will often be sought when addressing these matters.

Conclusion

Whether the above speculations ultimately come true precisely as stated is relatively unimportant. What matters most is that full consideration be given to the reasons why the predictions may or may not occur. In addition, the limitations of dealing at the macro level must also be recognized. Just as there may be a significant difference between the national rate of unemployment and the actual number of people out of work in a given community, so can there be differing degrees of impact on particular institutions. Once again, the value is in establishing a point of logical departure to aid in decision-making.

Colleges and universities will continue to have pressure, whether internally or externally generated, to change. But perhaps the greatest challenge will be to determine how to accommodate change while preserving the sanctity of the institution's mission. Adopting a change orientation that forsakes due consideration for mission is expedient at best, and suicidal at worst. But somewhere between "what always has been" and "whatever conceivably could be" is a point of equilibrium for every institution.

Proactive leadership involves the selection of strategy, and successful strategy is critically dependent upon accurate supposition. In short, the success of tomorrow's academic leaders will depend, in part, upon their ability to interact with the knowable future, and their subsequent ability to initiate organizational change in advance of actual observed experiences.

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